

NSF-OCE Guidelines for use of non-Academic Research Vessels
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Division of Ocean Sciences
Integrative Programs Section

Many Federally-funded research projects use vessels other than those operated as part of the U.S. Academic Research Fleet (ARF), defined as those vessels participating in the University National Oceanographic Laboratory System (UNOLS). This document describes the existing NSF Division of Ocean Sciences (OCE) guidelines with regard to the use of these non-ARF vessels for research funded by the National Science Foundation.

Safety of Personnel

The safety of all parties involved in NSF-funded field work is of paramount importance. However, as stated in [Cooperative Agreements-Financial and Administrative Terms \(CA-FATC\)](#) Article 44 and in [Research Terms and Conditions \(RTC\)](#) Article 29:

“NSF cannot assume any liability for accidents, illnesses or claims arising out of any work supported by an award or for unauthorized use of patented or copyrighted materials. The grantee institution is advised to take such steps as may be deemed necessary to insure or protect itself, its employees and its property.”

Chapter 18 of the [UNOLS Research Vessel Safety Standards \(RVSS\)](#) outlines the appropriate steps **required** by UNOLS operating institutions and **recommended** for all other institutions to ensure minimum safety standards are documented for non-ARF vessels. This guidance also includes a checklist (Appendix D) for minimum vessel safety specifications. Chartering institutions may have guidelines in place that meet or exceed the RVSS, where an established mechanism is in place that ensures adequate review.

Guidelines for UNOLS operating institutions

Institutions operating ARF vessels are required by their individual Cooperative Agreements with NSF to adhere to the RVSS. The RVSS states:

“When a UNOLS institution charters a vessel for research or education that is not operated by UNOLS or their home institution, the procedures of this chapter must be followed. The Principal Investigator, their respective institution’s Business, Risk Management, and/or General Counsel’s office and the institution’s Marine Operations office all have a responsibility to ensure that only vessels that are safe and suitable for a project are chartered.”

The chartering institution or their qualified representative must verify that the chartered vessel is in compliance with all applicable local, federal, and international regulations. Chapter 18 of the RVSS provides information on pre-charter, charter, and post-charter requirements.

Guidelines for all other institutions

While, non-UNOLS operating institutions lack a NSF Cooperative Agreement which would require adherence to the RVSS, it is the funding NSF program’s discretion to require the same due diligence be preformed for any sea-going charters. **Therefore, NSF-OCE strongly encourages all awardees to follow the RVSS guidelines when chartering vessels for oceanographic research to protect themselves, their property, and, most importantly, their employees and other personnel.** If knowledgeable marine operations staff are not available within an institution, NSF encourages the use of contracted resources (similar to the NSF Ship Inspection Program) to ensure a vessel is in compliance with the RVSS.

Program Costs and Scheduling

For additional costs to OCE programs beyond vessel charter rates (e.g., equipment and personnel) that are generally required in support of funded science, it is essential to describe fully, and as early in the proposal process as practical, the extent of logistical support required to conduct a given field project. Even in cases where ship time is provided at “no

cost” to NSF, or when the charter costs of non-ARF vessels are budgeted in science proposals, it is imperative to identify all additional facility and personnel support requirements since the cost for this support may be borne by a variety of programs within OCE.

UNOLS provides a mechanism to coordinate and schedule oceanographic work through its Ship Time Request (STR) system. This system should be used by all investigators to enter the name of the proposed charter vessel, whether in the Academic Fleet or not. Investigators wishing to use any of the pooled assets (e.g., vans, cables, and winches), technical support, or ancillary facilities supported by NSF (e.g., ROV, AUV, etc.) must also use the STR system to convey their proposed requirements to the various NSF Program(s) as well as to the facility operators. Failure to properly coordinate and communicate requirements through the UNOLS STR system may result in the denial of permission to use NSF-supported resources.

Written justification for use of facility assets should also be provided to the appropriate NSF Program Officer responsible for oversight of the facility. At a minimum, the UNOLS STR itself, or the information normally provided in the UNOLS STR system, should be provided to the NSF Facility Program Officer. This information must include:

1. Funding agency
2. Award number
3. Vessel name
4. Principal Investigator
5. Dates of cruise
6. Operating area
7. Equipment requested
8. Other relevant considerations

The cognizant Program Officer, in consultation with IPS ship operations personnel, will then use this information to make a determination as to whether or not the request for additional facilities support is appropriate.

Data

[The NSF/OCE Data and Sample Policy](#) defines expectations for awardees with regard to data produced in whole or in part through funding from the Division of Ocean Sciences. The policy states that:

“PIs are required to submit, at no more than incremental cost and within a reasonable time frame (but **no later than two (2) years after the data are collected**), the primary data, samples, physical collections and other supporting materials created or gathered in the course of work under NSF/OCE grants to the appropriate Data Center”

This policy builds on the requirements of the CA-FATC and provides additional guidance as to how investigators can provide robust data management plans. The OCE Data and Sample applies to oceanographic work conducted from both ARF and non-ARF vessels.

On ARF vessels, the responsibility for submission of all underway data is removed from the PI and is handled by the operator-institution through the Rolling Deck to Repository (R2R) gateway. The investigator assumes this responsibility for any research cruises on non-ARF vessels.